



'Little dark secret': DEA agent on trial accused of taking \$250K in bribes from Mafia



This June 13, 2016, file photo shows Drug Enforcement Administration agents in Florida.

Associated Press

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSH-
UA GOODMAN
Associated Press
BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The

way prosecutors tell it, Joseph Bongiovanni went to work for years with a "little dark secret."

Behind the veneer of a veteran U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent, they alleged, was a turncoat on

the take from the Buffalo Mafia, offering an "umbrella of protection" that derailed investigations of his childhood friends, covered for a sex-trafficking strip club and even helped a connected high school English teacher keep his marijuana-growing side hustle.

In a federal trial that began this month, prosecutors portrayed Bongiovanni as a greedy racist who pocketed more than \$250,000 in cash-stuffed envelopes over a decade and threw his colleagues off by opening bogus case files and encouraging them to spend less time investigating Italians and more time on Blacks and Hispanics, "n---- and s----" he was alleged to have called them. When authorities finally unmasked him in 2019, he hastily retired and wiped his cellphone clean.

"Sometimes the DEA

doesn't get it right," Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Tripi told jurors. "He was able to manipulate everyone because, in law enforcement, there's a certain amount of trust that's inherent. He did it under the watch of supervisors who under-supervised him."

The 59-year-old Bongiovanni has denied the counts of bribery, conspiracy and obstruction of justice that could land him behind bars for life, charges his attorney says are built on lies "so fanciful they don't just strain credibility, they rip it apart." The trial is the latest gut punch to the 4,100-agent DEA, which has seen at least 16 agents brought up on federal charges since 2015, a parade of misconduct that has revealed gaping holes in the agency's supervision.

Continued on next page

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Former DEA agent Joseph Bongiovanni arrives at the Robert H. Jackson U.S. Court House for a hearing for an upcoming trial on drug and bribery charges, Wednesday, June 21, 2023.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

The crimes have included child pornography, drug trafficking, leaking intelligence to defense attorneys and selling firearms to cartel associates, an Associated Press analysis found. One carried a "Liberty or Death" flag and flashed his badge outside the Capitol on Jan. 6. Another infiltrated the DEA in Chicago and helped traffickers smuggle thousands of kilos of cocaine from Puerto Rico to New York. At least three veteran agents are serving prison sentences of a decade or longer, including one who laundered money for cartels in Colombia and spent lavishly on expensive sports cars and Tiffany jewels, and an Arkansas-based agent recorded taking a bribe inside a Las Vegas casino.

The cases, coming amid an epidemic of more than 100,000 fatal drug overdoses a year, often present yearslong headaches for the U.S. Justice Department to determine whether any investigations were tainted when rogue agents betrayed the badge.

"We should not expect to see this much crime in one law enforcement agency," said Rachel Moran, an associate professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minneapolis. "The common thread I see here is a lack of oversight and accountability."

The DEA declined to comment. DEA Administrator Anne Milgram is herself the subject of an ongoing Inspector General inquiry examining whether the agency improperly hired some of her past associates.

Like other DEA scandals, the Bongiovanni case underscores recurring questions about the agency's hiring standards and ability to root out corruption. Background checks didn't turn up Bongiovanni's prior drug use and ties to Italian organized crime in his native Buffalo, prosecutors said, and not a single member of law enforcement was on to him until a trafficker paying for Bongiovanni's protection was arrested by another agency. "He's got that little dark secret," Tripi said. The trial, expected to last two months, is part of a broader sex-trafficking prosecution that has taken sensational turns, including an implicated judge who killed himself after the FBI raided his home, law enforcement dragging a pond in search

of an overdose victim and dead rats planted outside the home of a government witness who prosecutors allege was later killed by a fatal dose of fentanyl. Bongiovanni was raised in a tight-knit Italian American community in North Buffalo and known as a "door kicker" in the DEA, defense attorney Parker MacKay said, "not the type to sit in front of a computer." In his high school yearbook, Bongiovanni said he wanted to be a billionaire. But prosecutors said he went through financial struggles during his two-decade career that made him vulnerable to taking bribes. His protection ranged from providing an "all clear" assuring trafficker friends they were not on law enforcement's radar to leaking intelligence and opening

fictitious cases that made it appear he was investigating them or relying on them as informants, prosecutors said, a sort of catch-and-kill tactic that prevented other law enforcement agencies from pursuing their own cases. This also positioned Bongiovanni to receive notice any time another agency became interested in one of the targets, a process known as deconfliction. Bongiovanni also is accused of vouching for criminals, filing bogus reports and swiping a sensitive DEA case file on organized crime that he stored in his basement after his abrupt retirement.

Among the rackets Bongiovanni is accused of protecting is Pharoah's Gentlemen's Club, a strip club outside Buffalo described by prosecutors as a haven for drug use and sex trafficking. Bongiovanni was childhood friends with the owner, Peter Gerace Jr., who authorities allege has close ties to both the Buffalo Mafia and the notoriously violent Outlaws Motorcycle Club.

Prosecutors said Gerace had the agent on speed dial for advice when he needed to cover up the overdose of a stripper. The evidence includes a voicemail in which Gerace asks Bongiovanni about tracing a drug dealer's cellphone. "Is there a way to ping it like police do?" he said, according to court records. "I just want to know if you could do that or not."

Gerace attorney Mark Foti said his client "denies all charges and looks forward to confronting the government's evidence at his trial." The long list of witnesses in the case includes dozens of federal law enforcement officers and a public school teacher of 30 years who admitted running a marijuana-growing operation while receiving confidential information from Bongiovanni.

Prosecutor Tripi said Bongiovanni had two sets of rules, one for cronies lining his pockets and another for everyone else.

"He did just enough legitimate work to avoid detection," he said. "He almost got away with it." □

EPA approves year-round sales of higher ethanol blend in 8 Midwest states

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) —

Drivers in eight Midwestern states will be able to fuel up with a higher blend of ethanol throughout the year under a final rule announced Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency. The biofuels industry and farming groups, with support of Midwest governors, sought the end of a summertime ban on sales of gasoline blended with 15% ethanol for years. The higher blend has been prohibited because of concerns it could worsen smog during warm weather.

The move reflects the importance of ethanol to agriculture. The fuel additive consumes roughly 40% of the nation's corn crop, so higher sales of ethanol could mean greater profits for corn farmers.

The rule, which takes effect in April 2025, will apply in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Those states grow the bulk of the U.S. corn crop and are home to much of the nation's ethanol production. The EPA said it delayed implementation of the new rule because



An American Ethanol label is shown on a NASCAR race car gas tank at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Texas, Nov. 1, 2014.

of concerns there wasn't enough supply to meet demand this summer. Ethanol producers welcomed the change but criticized the EPA for that delay. "While we are pleased to see EPA has finally approved year-round E15 in these eight states, we are extremely disappointed by the agency's needless decision to delay implementation until

2025," the Renewable Fuels Association, a trade group, said in a statement. "It's helpful to finally have some certainty about 2025 and beyond, but what happens this summer?"

Most gasoline sold across the country is blended with 10% ethanol, though 15% blends are becoming increasingly common, especially in the Midwest.

E15 summer sales still will not be allowed in most of the country during summer, though agricultural groups are pushing for a nationwide policy change.

The biofuels industry and politicians of both parties have portrayed ethanol as a product that helps farmers, reduces prices at the pump and lessens greenhouse gas releases be-

cause the fuel burns more cleanly than straight gasoline. However, environmentalists and others have said increased ethanol production can increase carbon releases because it results in more corn production, leading to increased use of fertilizer and greater releases of nitrate. Synthetic and natural fertilizers also are a leading source of water pollution.

The EPA has approved sales of E15 for cars and trucks manufactured after 2000.

Grow Energy, another bioenergy trade association, estimates the higher blend will cost consumers 15 cents a gallon less than 10% ethanol.

Petroleum refiners have opposed the Midwest-specific rules, saying a special blend in one region would increase costs and could lead to tighter fuel supplies. The American Petroleum Institute, a trade group, said a national standard was needed. "We are concerned this piecemeal approach could weaken the resiliency of the region's fuel supply chain," Will Hupman, a vice president at the group said in a statement. □

Associated Press

Americans reporting nationwide cellular outages from AT&T, Cricket Wireless and other providers

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN

AP Business Writer

A number of Americans are dealing with cellular outag-

es on AT&T, Cricket Wireless, Verizon, T-Mobile and other service providers, according to data from Downdetector.

AT&T, who was the hardest hit, is actively working to restore service to all of its customers.

AT&T had more than 58,000 outages around noon ET, in locations including Houston, Atlanta and Chicago. The outages, which began at approximately 3:30 a.m. ET, peaked at around 73,000 reported incidents. The carrier has more than 240 million subscribers, the country's largest.

"Some of our customers are experiencing wireless service interruptions this morning. Our network teams took immediate action and so far three-quarters of our network has been restored.

We are working as quickly as possible to restore service to remaining customers," AT&T and Cricket said in a statement.

Cricket Wireless, which is owned by AT&T, had more than 9,000 outages, Downdetector said Thursday.

Verizon had more than 2,000 outages and T-Mobile had more than 1,400 outages. Boost Mobile had about 700 outages.

"Verizon's network is operating normally. Some customers experienced issues this morning when calling or texting with customers served by another carrier. We are continuing to monitor the situation," Verizon

said.

T-Mobile said that it did not experience an outage.

"Our network is operating normally. Down Detector is likely reflecting challenges our customers were having attempting to connect to users on other networks," T-Mobile said.

Some iPhone users have seen SOS messages displayed in the status bar on their cellphones. The message indicates that the device is having trouble connecting to their cellular provider's network, but it can make emergency calls through other carrier networks, according to Apple Support. □



A cellular phone tower is shown on Monday, May 22, 2017 in High Ridge, Mo.

Associated Press

Florida gets closer to banning social media for kids under 16

By **BRENDAN FARRINGTON**
Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida is on the verge of passing one of the nation's most restrictive bans on minors' use of social media after the state Senate passed a bill Thursday that would keep children under the age of 16 off popular platforms regardless of parental approval.

The measure now goes back to the state House, where the speaker has made the issue his top priority during the legislative session that ends March 8. Still, critics have pointed to similar efforts in other states that have been blocked by courts.

The bill targets any social media site that tracks user activity, allows children to upload material and interact with others, and uses addictive features designed to cause excessive or compulsive use. Supporters point to rising suicide rates among children, cyberbullying and predators using social media to prey on kids. "We're talking about businesses that are using addictive features to engage in mass manipulation of our children to cause



Rep. Erin Grall, R-Vero Beach Rep. asks a question in the Florida House of Representatives, May 25, 2022 at the Capitol in Tallahassee, Fla.

Associated Press

them harm," said the bill's sponsor, Republican state Sen. Erin Grall.

Other states have considered similar legislation, but most have not proposed a total ban. In Arkansas, a federal judge blocked enforcement of a law in August that required parental consent for minors to cre-

ate new social media accounts.

Supporters in Florida hope that if the bill becomes law, it would withstand legal challenges because it would ban social media formats based on addictive features such as notification alerts and autoplay videos, rather than the

content on their sites.

But opponents say it blatantly violates the First Amendment and that it should left to parents, not the government, to monitor children's social media use. "This isn't 1850. While parents show up at school board meetings to ban books, their kids are on

their iPads looking at really bad stuff," said Democratic state Sen. Jason Pizzo.

He sarcastically said lawmakers have other options if they want to parent other people's children.

"Let's have a bill that encourages engaging with your children, cooking dinner, sitting at a table together, making eye contact, calling grandma to see if she's OK once in a while," he said.

The state Senate passed the bill on a 23-14 vote, with a mix of Democrats and Republicans on both sides of the issue. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has expressed some skepticism of the legislation as currently written. DeSantis said he understood that the platforms could be harmful to teenagers, but that parents need to play a role in monitoring use.

"We can't say that 100% of the uses are bad because they're not," DeSantis said at an Orlando-area news conference. "I don't think it's there yet, but I hope we can get there in a way that answers parents' concerns."

Some parents also have mixed feelings. □

Feds accuse alleged Japanese crime boss of conspiring to traffic nuclear material

NEW YORK (AP) — A leader of a Japan-based crime syndicate conspired to traffic uranium and plutonium from Myanmar in the belief that Iran would use it to make nuclear weapons, U.S. prosecutors alleged Wednesday. Takeshi Ebisawa, 60, and his confederates showed samples of nuclear materials that had been transported from Myanmar to Thailand to an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agent posing as a narcotics and weapons trafficker who had access to an Iranian general, according to federal officials. The nuclear material was seized and samples were later found to contain uranium and weapons-grade plutonium.

"As alleged, the defendants in this case trafficked in drugs, weapons, and nuclear material going so far as to offer uranium and weapons-grade plutonium fully expecting that Iran would use it for nuclear weapons," DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in a statement. "This is an extraordinary example of the depravity of drug traffickers who operate with total disregard for human life."

The nuclear material came from an unidentified leader of an "ethnic insurgent group" in Myanmar who had been mining uranium in the country, according to prosecutors. Ebisawa had proposed that the leader sell uranium through him in order to fund a weapons

purchase from the general, court documents allege.

According to prosecutors, the insurgent leader provided samples, which a U.S. federal lab found contained uranium, thorium and plutonium, and that the "the isotope composition of the plutonium" was weapons-grade, meaning enough of it would be suitable for use in a nuclear weapon. Ebisawa, who prosecutors allege is a leader of a Japan-based international crime syndicate, was among four people who were arrested in April 2022 in Manhattan during a DEA sting operation. He has been jailed awaiting trial and is among two defendants named in a superseding indictment.

Ebisawa is charged with the international trafficking of nuclear materials, conspiracy to commit that crime, and several other counts.

An email seeking comment was sent to Ebisawa's attorney, Evan Loren Lipton. U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Ebisawa "brazenly" trafficked the material from Myanmar to other countries. "He allegedly did so while believing that the material was going to be used in the development of a nuclear weapons program, and the weapons-grade plutonium he trafficked, if produced in sufficient quantities, could have been used for that purpose," Williams said in the news release. □



This image provided by the U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York shows a photo from a complaint document filed by SDNY that shows Takeshi Ebisawa handling a rocket launcher.

Associated Press

U.S. Congress members praise Taiwan's democracy in a visit that's certain to draw China's scrutiny

By KEVIN FREKING and SIM-INA MISTREANU

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A group of United States Congress members met with Taiwan's president Thursday in a show of bipartisan support that is certain to draw scrutiny from China, which opposes such visits and sees them as a challenge to its claim of sovereignty over the self-governing island.

Two years ago, a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan resulted in China dispatching warships and military aircraft to all sides of the democratic island, and firing ballistic missiles into the waters nearby. In a meeting Thursday with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, Rep. Mike Gallagher, the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, highlighted the bipartisan support for the U.S.-Taiwan partnership, which he described as "stronger and more rock-solid than ever now."

The U.S., like most countries, doesn't formally recognize Taiwan as a country but maintains robust informal relations with the island and is bound by its own laws to provide it with the weapons



In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, right, meets with Rep. Mike Gallagher, the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, center, and Raja Krishnamoorthi, D.-Ill., in Taipei, Taiwan, Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024.

it needs to defend itself. Gallagher thanked Tsai, who is nearing the end of her second and last term in office, for her leadership in Taiwan and for distinguishing herself "as a leader within the free world." Tsai thanked the U.S. for continuing to help Taiwan strengthen its self-defense capabilities. "Together we are safeguarding freedom and democracy and maintaining

regional peace," she said, adding that she hoped to see more exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan in a range of domains. In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that China opposes any form of official exchange between the U.S. and Taiwan. "Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory," she said. The delegation, led by Gallagher, R-Wis., and Raja

Krishnamoorthi, D.-Ill., was expected to be in Taiwan for three days as part of a larger visit to the Indo-Pacific region. Other members include Reps. John Moolenaar, R-Mich.; Dusty Johnson, R-S.D.; and Seth Moulton, D-Mass. Consisting of some of Congress' staunchest critics of China, the bipartisan delegation was to meet with other senior Taiwanese leaders and members of

civil society to discuss U.S.-Taiwan relations, regional security and trade, among other issues of mutual interest.

Krishnamoorthi said Taiwan is one of the United States' "closest friends" and a role model for democracy, after Lai Ching-te emerged victorious as Taiwan's president-elect and vowed to safeguard the island's de facto independence from China and further align it with other democracies.

"It's one of the most robust, most vibrant, one of the most exciting democracies in the world," Krishnamoorthi said. "And this year, when half of the world's population will be going to the polls to vote, you provided a role model for how elections should be conducted, and for that we salute you on this peaceful transfer of power, and you are an exemplar of democracy." Krishnamoorthi is the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party's ranking Democrat. The committee was formed in 2023 and has held numerous hearings focused on human rights, trade, cyber intrusions and other issues central to the rising tensions between the two superpowers. □

Associated Press

Denmark records highest number of antisemitic incidents since WWII, part of a grim European trend

By JAN M. OLSEN

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The number of anti-

semitic incidents registered in Denmark since the Oct. 7 attack on Israel that ignited the war in Gaza has

reached levels not seen since World War II, the head of the Scandinavian country's small Jewish community said Thursday.

"We have seen the the biggest antisemitic wave in Denmark since 1943," when Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany, Henri Goldstein, head of the 1,800-strong Jewish Community, told The Associated Press on Thursday. That was the year some 7,200 Danish Jews were evacuated to neutral Sweden to prevent their deportation to a Nazi concentration camp, leaving almost no Jews in Denmark.

The figures, compiled by

the community's security organization, were on a par with reports in other European countries. Goldstein said that "after Oct. 7, we have seen antisemitism on steroids."

"We have seen a violent escalation, not least fueled by the uncontrolled spread of hatred on social media," he said, adding that in 2023, "all 121 incidents were Jew-hatred - and not 'just criticism of Israel.'" Of the 121 incidents, 20 were death threats "which we have not since since the 1980s," Goldstein said, referring to threats made then against two leading figures in the Jewish com-

munity - an editor-in-chief and the chief rabbi.

Jews in Denmark were advised not to wear Jewish symbols openly, Goldstein said.

Most of the cases involved hate messages, more than half of them online. The report only mentioned known cases of antisemitism but the community said that "the vast majority of antisemitic incidents are never reported."

Many European countries have registered a rise in reported antisemitic acts and comments since the outbreak of the war in Gaza. There are currently up to 7,000 Jews in Denmark. □



A soldier of the Danish Army (Forsvaret) guards the Copenhagen Synagogue, Saturday Dec. 16, 2023.

Associated Press

A stray whale died in Osaka Bay, raising questions about the cause and the cost of disposal

By **MARI YAMAGUCHI**
Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A whale as long as a train car that died after straying into a port in Osaka last month is set to be buried until it naturally becomes a skeletal specimen for a local museum. It's the third year in a row that whales have become stranded in the area, raising questions about the reasons why and the cost of handling the incidents. The animal is believed to be a male sperm whale, about 12 meters (39 feet) long and weighing an estimated 20 tons, and was earlier spotted in the Sakai Semboku Port in mid-January.

It had since been spotted in a number of locations in Osaka Bay, until Sunday, when a boat captain reported to the coast guard that the whale was not breathing. Prefectural officials and experts took a boat out to check on the whale and confirmed its death on Monday, presumably due to starvation. Osaka officials have decided to bury the dead whale at a section of a nearby-industrial waste disposal complex after cetacean experts carried out an au-



A whale, confirmed dead by field investigation, floats in Osaka Bay in Sakai city, western Japan, on Feb. 19, 2024.

opsy, collecting samples to determine the cause of the whale's death, prefectural environmental department official Toshihiro Yamawaki said. Television footage showed the dead whale being carefully lifted by a crane and transported to the burial site, where it will stay underground for a few years until it becomes naturally skeletonized. Officials will then dig it up and donate

it to the local natural museum. The cause of the stranding is unknown. Yamawaki said whales have been sighted on and off not only in Osaka Bay but across Japan, noting experts' view that whales generally follow the movement of the warm Kuroshio tide. Those that somehow miscalculated the distance and went too close to the coast may become strand-

ed, scientists think. On average, more than 300 whale strandings have been reported across Japan annually, though the number fluctuates every year. In 2020, more than 370 strandings were reported, while the number decreased to 116 last year, according to the National Museum of Nature and Science's whale stranding site. The Osaka case involved a

single animal as with in most other strandings, though sometimes several whales have been seen stranded on nearby coasts. Experts have cited a number of possible causes for the stranding, including tidal fluctuations, diseases and climate change, but they are still under investigation. Some experts noted the structure of Osaka Bay, which has many narrow passages, may make it difficult for stray whales to go back to the sea. As soon as the whale was spotted, prefectural officials had started discussing what to do in case it died in the bay. They learned their lesson the hard way last year, when another stranded sperm whale, Yodo-chan, died only four days after it showed up and began to decompose, at a cost to the public purse of more than 80 million yen (\$533,000), triggering criticism. The cost of the offshore burial was nearly 10 times the amount spent in 2021 on another stray whale that was buried on land. "The cost will be much lower this time," Osaka Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura reassured residents. □

Associated Press

Brazil's Bolsonaro chooses to remain silent in meeting with police as part of coup allegation

By **ELÉONORE HUGHES**
Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and some of his former top aides met Thursday with police as part of an investigation into allegations they plotted a coup to remove Bolsonaro's successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro arrived at Federal Police headquarters in the capital Brasilia, as did some of his former officials, including some top military advisers. The former leader chose to remain silent. Supreme Court documents show the alleged plot involved Bolsonaro signing

a decree in the event that he lost the 2022 election to declare that the vote was fraudulent, to justify a possible military intervention and convene new elections. Bolsonaro never issued the decree to set the final stage of the alleged plan in action. No one has been formally charged in the case. A total of 23 people were expected to give statements Thursday, of which 13 were in Brasilia, according to a federal official, who requested anonymity to share the information. Among them were Bolsonaro, his 2022 running mate and minister, Gen. Walter

Braga Netto; a former adviser, Gen. Augusto Heleno; former Justice Minister Anderson Torres and the head of Bolsonaro's Liberal Party, Valdemar Costa Neto. "Police can begin to identify inconsistencies or gaps in information, no matter how much they have prepared for it," said Leonardo Paz, a political scientist at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a think tank and university in Rio de Janeiro. Bolsonaro said before the meeting he would likely decline to comment to police, citing a lack of access to documents. "I follow the advice of the lawyers. If they have access (to the

file) by tomorrow, obviously I'll talk," he said during an

interview with CBN radio on Wednesday. □



Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro arrives to Federal Police headquarters to testify in an ongoing investigation in Brasilia, Brazil, Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024.

Associated Press

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Food culture in Aruba

(Oranjestad) - Like many other cultures, an important aspect of the Aruban cultural identity is our connection to food and food traditions. The local food traditions consist of a melting pot of different cultural and religious eating habits and dishes.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

The routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner on the island is one that does not completely follow a European or American routine, despite the major influences from these parts of the world on our culture and way of living. When it comes to the three important meals of the day, most of the Aruban population follows a Latin-American influenced routine.

Breakfast

Breakfast in Aruba is quite simple: a cup of coffee or tea, some bread, and sometimes an egg. Sometimes, due to the need of a quick "to-go" breakfast, you may also



find many snack trucks and cafes that sell sandwiches, pastechis (meat pie), arepas and empanadas early in the morning.

Main Meal

The main meal is typically eaten in most households around noon or in the afternoon. This can consist of meat, fish, and chicken—stewed or fried—with funchi (polenta) or rice with stewed vegetables. Often, fried or boiled plantain or pan bati (Aruban pancake) is included. Stews are a staple in Aruban cuisine and can be largely influenced by Latin-American and Latin/Afro-Caribbean Stews. Some of the more unique stews and soups from the ABC Islands* include sopi di bonchi cora (red kidney bean soup with pig tail), sopi mondongo (tripe soup), carni stoba (beef stew), comcomber stoba (West Indian gherkin stew) and much more.

Dinner Time

Dinner time can vary significantly from household to household. Unlike the U.S. or in Europe, dinner time typically does not consist of a whole (warm) meal. Instead, the evening "meal" can typically consist of something lighter, like a sandwich, though it is not uncommon

to see leftovers from the main meal reheated and eaten again. Tea and coffee are often also served with the evening snack.

(Religious) Holidays

Christmas is probably the biggest global holiday, and every culture has its own spin on what their Christmas cuisine entails. In Aruba, our Christmas cuisine is again largely based on Latin-American influences, most notably from Venezuela. Ayacas and the famous pan di ham* are two crucial holiday dishes, along with stuffed turkey, roasted glazed ham topped with pineapples, arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) and potato salad, among other items. Traditional drinks include ponche crema (Aruban eggnog), chuculati pinda (hot chocolate with peanut butter), and homemade fruit punch. Desserts include, bolo di pistachio (pistachio cake), bolo di cashupete (cashew cake), quesillo (flan), bolo preto (dark fruit cake), drigidek (gingerbread), pan boyo (bread cake) and more.

Snacks and tasty delights

Besides meals and dishes that are eaten on the dinner table, Aruba

also has a food tradition that includes snacks and other tasty delights that you may easily find around the island. These include, Saco*, basket, pastechi, kroket, deditos, Johnny cake and more. These snacks are usually sold at local snack trucks and cafes, often located on the side of the road. In the area of Tanki Leendert and Tanki flip, for example, there are many of these trucks parked on the side of the road and often open until late at night—offering tasty and filling snacks post night-life fun.

*ABC Islands: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao

*Pan di ham: Derived from the Venezuelan Pan de Jamon (rolled up bread with ham, raisins and olives)

*Saco: Saco literally means "bag". Saco contains fried potatoes, plantains, chicken (and ribs) and a Johnny cake, served in a paper bag.

Source: Voeding, voedingsgewoonten en gerechten op Aruba (Nutrition, Food Traditions and Dishes on Aruba) by Biblioteca Nacional Aruba



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fruits, passed down from our elders through generations. This week, we present two more uses of fruits and plants for medicinal use.

Sweet potato

According to our elders, sweet potato is mostly useful for low blood pressure. People who suffer from low blood pressure were advised to eat sweet potato 2 to 3 times a week. However, if you have high blood pressure, it is best not to eat too much sweet potato, as this raises blood pressure. Sweet potatoes are also great for people who work hard labor jobs, and it's been said to be aid blood circulation in the body, as well as help those with hemorrhoids or diarrhea.

Many of our elders opted to plant sweet potatoes themselves, mostly because of how easy it was to do so. Cut the end of a sweet potato let it sit in shallow wa-

ter until it starts to sprout. Then you may plant it in the ground. Sweet potatoes need plenty of water to grow, especially in the first week in the ground. It was said that once you start to notice the ground crack underneath the flowers, it is time to harvest. This should happen around month 3.

Pomegranate

Pomegranates are also one of the easier fruits to plant and harvest. Originated from Persia, this plant can grow almost everywhere. In Aruba, there are many homes that have a tiny or big pomegranate tree. You may be wondering what the difference is between a small and big pomegranate tree, for which the answer is based on harvest time. Tiny trees produce tinier pomegranates that can be harvested early on. Contrarily, big trees produce bigger pomegranates, but they

need enough time to fully ripen before harvesting, otherwise you might end up with bitter seeds. Pomegranate trees are also very easy to plant. In essence, if you just throw the seeds on the ground, they could grow into a tree.

In terms of medicinal use, pomegranate skins are said to have a few benefits for our health. According to customs, pomegranate skin tea can help those that suffer from diarrhea. Dried pomegranate skin tea is also good for people who have worms. Pomegranate flowers can be boiled to make a drink and this can be used for irritated gums; just take a swig and let the tea sit in your mouth for a couple minutes.

Source: Remedi i Kustumber di nos Bieunan (Medicine and Customs of our Elderly) by Dinah Veeris



(Oranjestad)—In last week's edition, we shared with our readers some medicinal use for plants and

Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Costa Linda Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. These Ambassadors were respectively honored with a certificate acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels

are as follows:
Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:
Goodwill Ambassadors Mr. George & Mrs. Eloise Leupold from New Jersey, United States
Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Costa Lin-

da Beach Resort bestowed the certificate to the honorees, presented them with memorable gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their best-loved vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honorees were:
The Costa Linda Beach Resort & Aruba's beautiful beaches
"The friends we have made over the years that have become like family to us"
Costa Linda's wonderful staff
Aruba's restaurants

"Watching the sunset over the ocean"

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we

would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".



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Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Playa Linda Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Emerald Ambassadors of Aruba. These Ambassadors were respectively honored with a certificate acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to

guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels are as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba) | Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba) | Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba) |
|---|---|--|

The honorees were:

Emerald Ambassadors Mr. Kenneth & Mrs. Barbara Varga from New Jersey, United States

Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Playa Linda Beach Resort bestowed the Emerald Ambassador certificate to the honorees, presented them with gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba

as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by the honorees were:

- Aruba's warm and friendly people always treat them like family
- Aruba's sun
- Aruba's nice sandy beaches
- "The ease of traveling to Aruba"
- Aruba's year-round sunny



weather

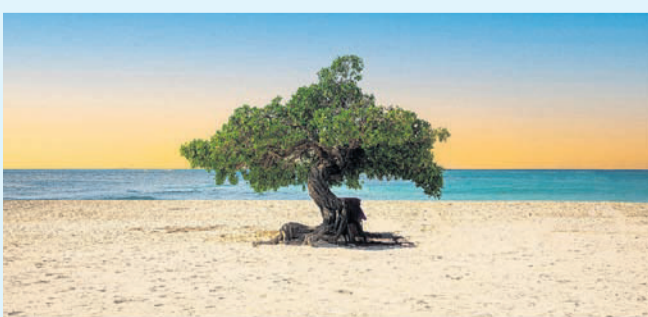
On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back or still enjoying your vacation?... we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

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Visit the historic museum at Fort Zoutman!



(Oranjestad)—Located in the middle of downtown Oranjestad, situated right next to the government building “Cocolishi”, is one of the oldest buildings of Aruba: Fort Zoutman. First constructed in 1796, this site has been used (or left unused) in many ways and have survived eras of war and attempted dismantling.

When anyone refers to Fort Zoutman, they are actually referring to two separate buildings that, over the years, have been merged: the fort and the tower. That's right, the iconic 5-story, squared tower was

not part of the original structure of the fort, and is actually called “Willem III Toren”. Constructed in 1867, this tower was named after the then-reigning king of The Netherlands, Willem III. Willem III Toren was originally a light tower, but after a request from Lieutenant Governor Jan Helenus in 1866, it also became a bell tower.

The fort itself was originally constructed to protect the commerce bay of Paardenbaai from pirates and other disreputable characters roaming the Caribbean Sea. Unlike the Willem III Toren, Fort Zout-

man had a more tumultuous past, including the

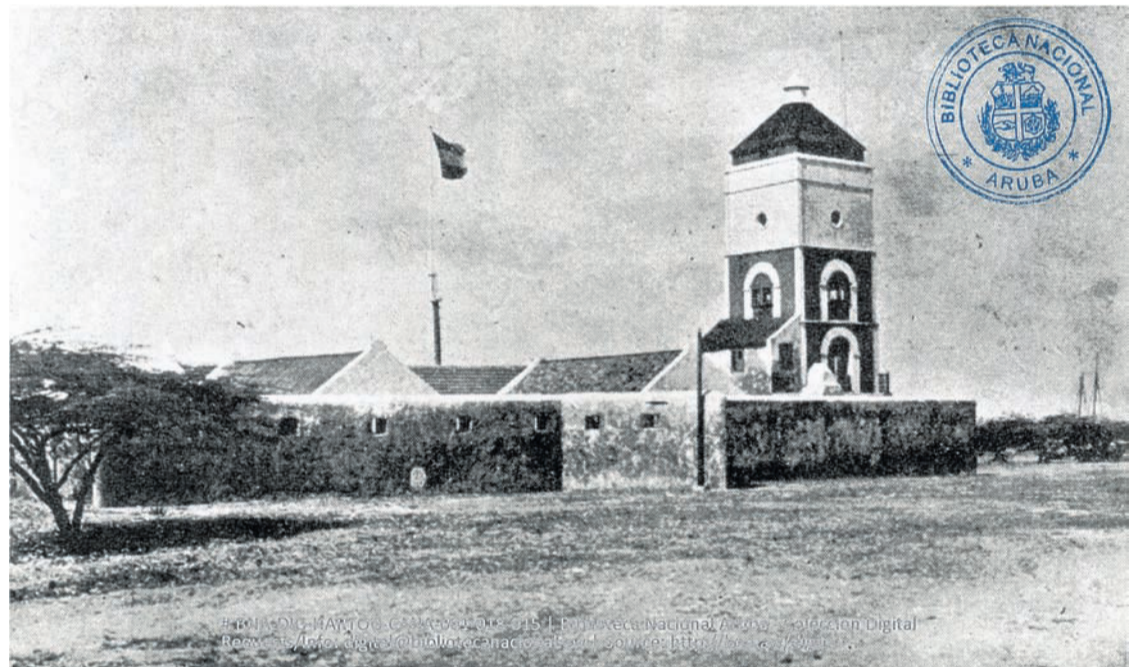
on-and-off reception of unwanted members of the English military several times (The Netherlands was at constant war with England back in the colonial era).

Over the years, both the fort and the tower had functioned as different government center points, including a tax and stamps office. For some time these two buildings also housed a police precinct and jail, and even experienced abandonment until the Cultural Center Aruba Foundation (CCA) petitioned for its renovation in 1964, turning the site into the Historic Museum it currently is.

Despite its small size, The Historic Museum guards a rich depository of the commercial, military and social history of Oranjestad, offering a glance into how the social culture of the town came to be. If you are interested in history and want to learn more about Aruba, then Fort Zoutman should definitely be included into your itinerary.

The museum is open Monday to Friday from 9am-6pm, and Saturday from 10am-2pm.

Source: The Old Fort of Aruba by Jan Hartog.



Enjoy one of the best views on Aruba at the top of the Hooiberg Hill

(Oranjestad)—If you are a regular hiker, or maybe want to spice up your morning work out session, then you might enjoy one of the most popular climbing sites on the island: The Hooiberg Hill. Accompanied with a 600-step staircase, this hill overlooks a great part of the island, the Caribbean sea, and sometimes even the Santa Anna mountain located in the coastal state of Falcon in Venezuela, providing one of the best views you can get on Aruba.

located at the center district of the island, Santa Cruz, the Hooiberg Hill is the second highest point on the island at 165 meters

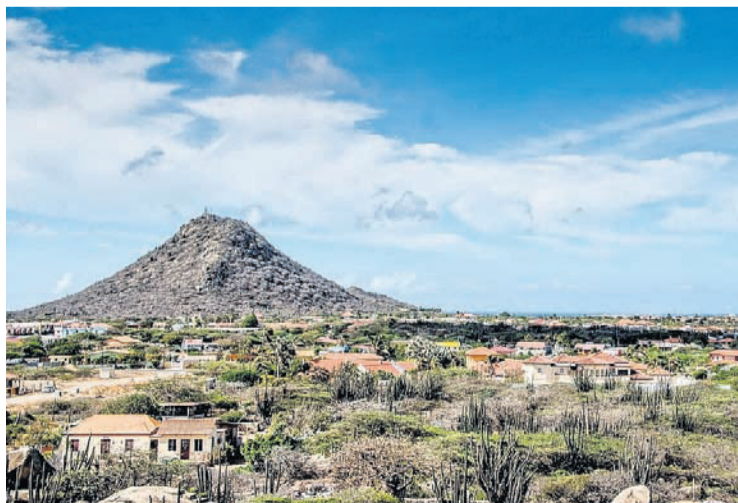
above sea level (or about 540 feet above sea level). The highest point is Jamanota Hill at 189 meters (620 feet), located in the Arikok National Park.

The staircase that run on the side of the hill was first

built in 1951, when Mr. Eduardo Tromp constructed it. At that time, the staircase consisted of 900 steps. Over time, as the steps faced erosion, the government decided to renovate these stairs in 1991. This new project delivered the

newer staircase with only 587 steps. However, don't be fooled—it may still be a work out to get on top. In addition, there is now a gazebo placed halfway up the stair for a little rest. The view at this resting stop is also a sight to see.

The best time to climb the hill would be early in the morning or right before sunset, as it may not be as hot. However, the hill is of course open all day, every day.



Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whip-tail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanation-alpark.org

Philip's Animal Garden

To stay with the animals, let's hop to an amazing place. Something different to do, an experience that is to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Welcome to Philip's Animal Garden. We are not talking about a zoo here, this is actually a sanctuary for all types of creatures, from horses

to peacocks, kangaroos to turtles, monkeys, goats, and many, many more different species. The place was founded in 2009 and it is the only organization rescuing and rehabilitating exotic animals in Aruba, which has resulted in an amazing collection of these animals. They provide a suitable living environment for all the rescued animals. Up until now the owner, Philip, has built this shelter with his own efforts; building all the cages from scratch, designing all structures and welding them with his own bare hands. His goal is to upgrade the facilities to a world-class animal shelter with veterinary care and round-the-clock staffs. With the input from the Aruban community and visitors they provide the best care for these animals. Please check out their website for more information: www.philipsanimalgarden.com.

The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to

miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.

Take an "off-road" sightseeing tour

A must-do activity on the island is for sure taking an off-road sightseeing tour. If you have a rented car, you can drive through the north-eastern side of Aruba and explore the natural pools, caves, rock formations and gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean. To access most of these sights, like the natural pool (Conchi) and the Guadirikiri and Fontein caves, you must enter through the Arikok National Park and buy a day pass. Then you drive up the rugged road that leads you through the white dunes, caves and along the wind turbines. Other locations, like the Ayo and Casibari Rock formation are situated more in the center of the island, and are free for guests, 24 hours a day.

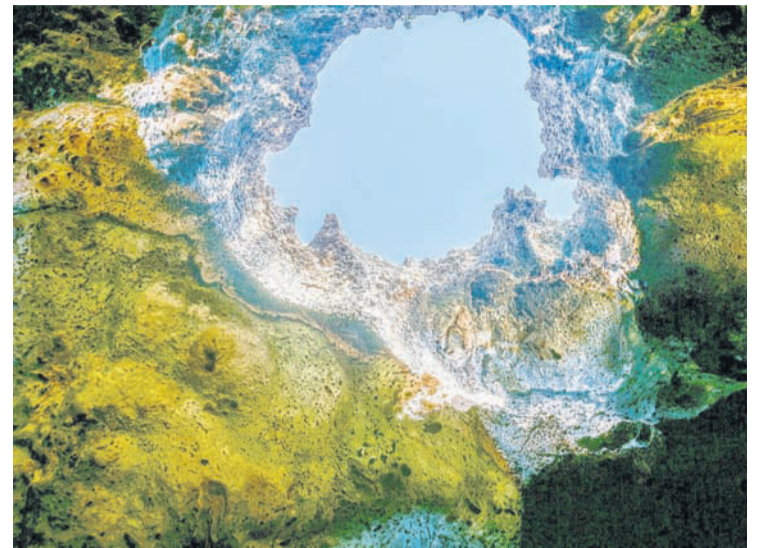
Go for a shopping spree in the city center

Need a new bathing suit? Head to the city center of Oranjestad, where there is countless of different stores—both high end and more affordable—that can offer you the service you deserve! Local shopping stores often offer a more affordable price, and have a variety of clothes, shoes, bathing suites, purses and more. Along the Royal Plaza strip, there are numerous jewelry stores with great quality jewelry. In the Renaissance mall, you can shop high-end luxury brands, like Dolce & Gab-

bana, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton and more.

Around the high-rise hotel area near Palm Beach, the

Paseo Herencia Mall contain a variety of shopping stores, restaurants, small food stands and even a movie theater!



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 42 Skiing
 - 1 Supple spot
 - 6 Aquarium 43 Like fish some
 - 11 Earthy seals pigment 44 Campout sights
 - 12 Grill waste
 - 13 Note from the boss 45 Does some house-work
 - 14 Track events
 - 15 Pouchlike part
 - 16 Stunned wonder
 - 18 Links position
 - 19 Swelled head
 - 20 June honoree
 - 21 Tourist stop
 - 22 Email field
 - 24 Sports figure
 - 25 Car racer Enzo
 - 27 Fencing sword
 - 29 Pedro's pals
 - 32 Simple denials
 - 33 Some crime evidence
 - 34 Music booster
 - 35 — Alamos
 - 36 "— not for me to say"
 - 37 Casual top
 - 38 Figure of speech
 - 40 Boosted

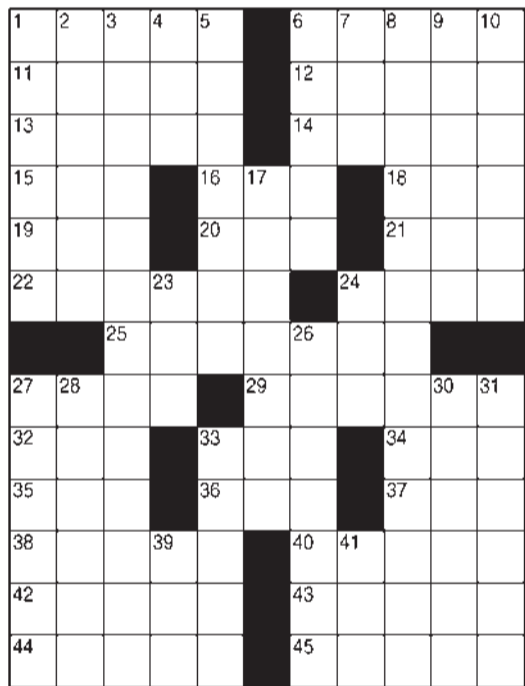


Yesterday's answer

- 7 Language suffix
- 8 John Grisham book
- 9 Eye part
- 10 Agreement
- 17 Arrest paper
- 23 Ruby of films
- 24 — Lanka
- 26 Stockpiled
- 27 Sign up
- 28 Curly-coated dog
- 30 Diner order
- 31 Goes 80
- 33 Some change
- 39 Make a choice
- 41 Letter after sigma

DOWN

- 1 Red-ink amounts
- 2 Glacial period
- 3 John Grisham book
- 4 Skirt edge
- 5 Device for a book lover
- 6 Domesticated



2-23

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-23 CRYPTOQUOTE

K G X ' D K D X K R A D C D Q K X H
D Q Y D D C T C S S C B K G Y X A B
U Y Z B K D Q X C T K G D Y H A G K X
K D Z A D ? — E V R Z T Y V U
T C X D F C T A S Z

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: SOONER OR LATER, IF MAN IS EVER TO BE WORTHY OF HIS DESTINY, WE MUST FILL OUR HEARTS WITH TOLERANCE. — STAN LEE

2 things pet insurance will cover (and 3 it won't)

By SARAH SCHLICHTER of NerdWallet

If you've ever spent a fortune at the emergency vet, pet insurance might sound appealing. By paying some of your vet expenses, these policies can save you money and help you make care decisions based on what's best for your pet rather than what you can afford.



A person walks their dog through the snow Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024, in Providence, R.I.

Associated Press

But insurance doesn't pay for everything. Before you buy pet insurance, you'll want to understand exactly what it will and won't cover.

COVERED: ACCIDENTS

If you want coverage for unexpected vet expenses, you can choose either an accident-only plan or an accident and illness plan. Both can pay to treat injuries such as broken bones, snakebites or swallowed socks. Coverage varies by company, but you can expect most pet insurance policies to pay for diagnostic tests, surgery and

medications, Dr. Aliya McCullough, chief veterinary officer and director of veterinary affairs at Fetch Pet Insurance, said in an email. The vet's examination fee may or may not be covered, depending on your policy.

And some companies may charge extra to cover prescription medication. Most pet insurance policies

have a waiting period between when you buy the plan and when coverage takes effect. If your pet is injured during the waiting period, your plan won't reimburse you.

USUALLY COVERED: ILLNESS

The most common type of insurance, accident and illness coverage, also pays for treatment if your pet gets sick. □

Amazon to be added to the Dow Jones Industrial Average, replacing Walgreens Boots Alliance



The Amazon logo is seen, June 15, 2023, at the Vivatech show in Paris.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon.com Inc. is being added to the Dow Jones Industrial Average, joining Apple, Walt Disney, Walmart and other companies that make up the 30-stock average. The e-commerce giant will replace drugstore operator Walgreens Boots Alliance in the Dow before the open of trading on Monday, S&P Dow Jones Indices said Tuesday.

The shift was prompted by Walmart's decision to do a 3-to-1 stock split, which will reduce its stock's weighting in the index. The Dow is a price-weighted index, so stocks that fetch higher prices are given more weight.

Seattle-based Amazon will join the Dow on the same day that Walmart executes its stock split. □

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Silent brain changes precede Alzheimer's. Researchers have new clues about which come first

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Alzheimer's quietly ravages the brain long before symptoms appear and now scientists have new clues about the dominolike sequence of those changes a potential window to one day intervene.

A large study in China tracked middle-aged and older adults for 20 years, using regular brain scans, spinal taps and other tests. Compared to those who remained cognitively healthy, people who eventually developed the mind-robbing disease had higher levels of an Alzheimer's-linked protein in their spinal fluid 18 years prior to diagnosis, researchers reported Wednesday. Then every few years afterward, the study detected another so-called biomarker of brewing trouble.

Scientists don't know exactly how Alzheimer's forms. One early hallmark is that sticky protein called beta-amyloid, which over time builds up into brain-clogging plaques. Amyloid alone isn't enough to damage memory plenty of healthy people's brains harbor a lot of plaque. An abnormal tau protein that forms neuron-killing tangles is one of several co-conspirators.

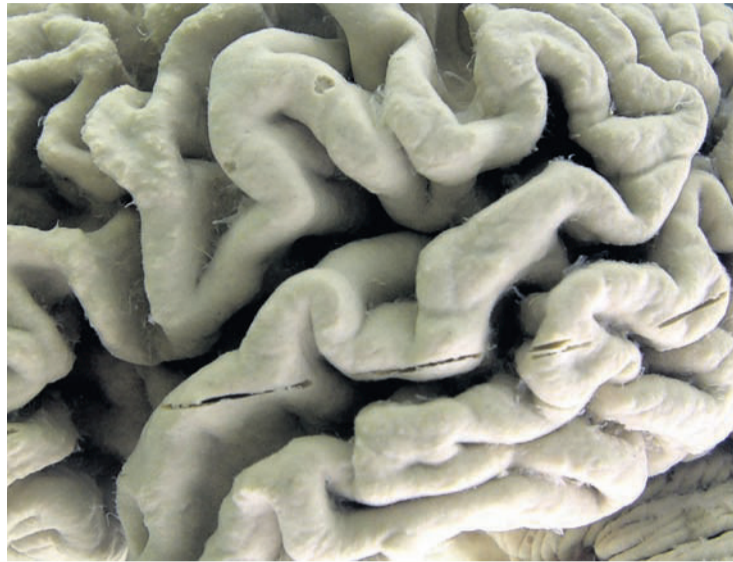
The new research, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, offers a timeline for how those abnormalities pile up.

The study's importance "cannot be overstated," said Dr. Richard Mayeux, an Alzheimer's specialist at Columbia University who wasn't involved in the research.

"Knowledge of the timing of these physiological events is critical" for testing new ways of treating and maybe eventually even preventing Alzheimer's, he wrote in an accompanying editorial.

The findings have no practical implications yet.

More than 6 million Ameri-



A closeup of a human brain affected by Alzheimer's disease, is displayed at the Museum of Neuroanatomy at the University at Buffalo in Buffalo, N.Y., on Oct. 7, 2003.

Associated Press

cans, and millions more worldwide, have Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia. There's no cure. But last year a drug named Leqembi became the first approved with clear evidence that it could slow the worsening of early Alzheimer's albeit for a few months.

It works by clearing away some of that gunky amyloid protein. The approach also is being tested to see if it's possible to delay Alzheimer's onset if high-risk people are treated before symptoms appear. Still other drugs are being developed to target tau. Tracking silent brain changes is key for such research.

Scientists already knew that in rare, inherited forms of Alzheimer's that strike younger people, a toxic form of amyloid starts accumulating about two decades ahead of symptoms and at some point later tau kicks in.

The new findings show the order in which such biomarker changes occurred with more common old-age Alzheimer's.

Researchers with Beijing's Innovation Center for Neurological Disorders compared 648 people eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's and an equal number who remained healthy. The amyloid finding in future Alzheimer's

patients was the first, 18 years or 14 years prior to diagnosis depending on the test used.

Differences in tau were detected next, followed by a marker of trouble in how neurons communicate. A few years after that, differences in brain shrinkage and cognitive test scores between the two groups became apparent, the study found.

"The more we know about viable Alzheimer's treatment targets and when to address them, the better and faster we will be able to develop new therapies and preventions," said Claire Sexton, the Alzheimer's Association's senior director of scientific programs. She noted that blood tests are coming soon that promise to also help by making it easier to track amyloid and tau. □



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Hillary Swank gives inspirational 'Ordinary Angels' both the heart and heft it needs

By **JOCELYN NOVECK**
AP National Writer

At the end of "Ordinary Angels," we're given one of those now-see-how-it-really-happened moments with real footage mirroring the climax of the film. That's a really good thing.

Because otherwise, one might be tempted to think the filmmakers had dreamed up a story too sappy and inspirational to be true. But no, this tale of how one determined woman rallied her community to help save a dying young girl took place largely as it's presented.

Despite the compelling source material, "Ordinary Angels" is one of those movies where you can predict developments with certainty. You know in your bones when the phone's about to ring with a fateful call. You know when a character is finally going to lose patience, telegraphing the obligatory Moment of Conflict. And you know when an alcoholic is going to relapse, even before the shot of the beers in the fridge. Such predictability can be fatal for a film, but "Ordinary Angels," directed by Jon Gunn, has something crucial going for it: Hilary Swank. Not for nothing, we soon recall, has Swank won two Oscars. With her innate groundedness even in big hair, fringed jacket, sparkly dress and pink heels she can lend truth to most any scenario. She gives what could have been



This image released by Lionsgate shows Hilary Swank in a scene from "Ordinary Angels." Associated Press

merely a pass-the-Kleenex weepie its heart, yes, but more importantly its heft.

First, though, we meet Ed, a Kentucky roofer (Alan Ritchson, solid and appealing). In flashback, Ed welcomes his second daughter at the hospital with his wife, and the loving couple name her Michelle. Flash forward five years, though, and Ed's wife is dying of a congenital disease. A devastated Ed promises to take care of the girls.

Now we meet Sharon (Swank), a single hairdresser with an estranged son. She's also what they call

hard-living, which means we meet her at where else? a bar, where she dances on the counter and does shots and falls down and ends up a mascara-stained mess. Her wise friend Rose there's always a wise friend forces her to an AA meeting, but Sharon still won't call herself an alcoholic. But she does hear some good advice at the meeting, where a man describes learning to "find a reason to be here that's bigger than you are."

Like clockwork, Sharon sees an article in the local paper about a 5-year-old

girl Ed's daughter Michelle whose mother has just died and who now needs a liver transplant. Sharon shows up at the funeral unannounced, then tells Rose back at the salon that she thinks her destiny is to find the money for the transplant. But meanwhile, there are huge hospital bills, and Ed can't afford them. Without asking, Sharon holds a fundraiser and shows up at the house with several thousand dollars in cash. Ed is, understandably, perplexed at this woman who is soon eating dinner with the family. But his mother,

Barbara, welcomes Sharon with open arms. "Mom, she's a mess," Ed says. "Perfect, she'll fit right in here," Barbara replies.

Certainly they need money. For one hospital stay, Ed, who has no health insurance, is charged more than \$6,000 (the scene is an advertisement for socialized medicine). Soon Sharon is sitting down with Ed and going through all his bills, making piles of "urgent" and "very urgent." ("Daddy's in over his head," says older daughter Ashley.) Sharon also helps Ed market his roofing skills.

But Sharon is struggling in her own life. Her estranged son, embittered by her alcoholism during his childhood, rejects her efforts to reconcile. Sharon's words to him, even uttered by the always-authentic Swank, are trite: "I know I let you down," she says. "Being a single mom ain't easy."

The by-the-numbers script also leaves us wondering when, a full hour into the movie, Ed asks Sharon about her past: "Married? Kids?" You'd think that would have come up many moons ago, but OK. Things go back and forth between Ed and Sharon, who may be an angel but lacks boundaries. She pretends to be his sister to call and find out what he owes the hospital. But later, she convinces a group of hospital executives to erase hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. □



Beyoncé performs at a Get Out the Vote concert for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton at the Wolstein Center in Cleveland, Ohio, Nov. 4, 2016.

Associated Press

Beyoncé becomes first Black woman to claim top spot on Billboard's country

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Beyoncé made history once again: The superstar singer has become the first Black woman to top Billboard's country music chart.

The Grammy winner achieved the feat after her new single "Texas Hold 'Em" reached No. 1 on the country airplay chart this week. She dropped the song on Feb. 11 during the Super Bowl along with her

other single "16 Carriages," which debuted at No. 9 on the same chart. Both songs are expected to be featured on Beyoncé's upcoming, country-themed album, which is referred to as "act ii," on March 29. It's a follow-up offering to her 2022 album "Renaissance," which is frequently referred to as "Act I: Renaissance." Beyoncé announced the full-length new album after

a Verizon commercial she starred in aired during the Super Bowl this month.

Beyoncé is also the first woman to claim the top spot on the Hot Country Songs and Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs charts since both began in 1958, according to Billboard. The only other acts who have topped both include Justin Bieber, Billy Ray Cyrus and Ray Charles. □

Rivers hasn't been what the doctor ordered yet and struggling Bucks have work to do down the stretch

By STEVE MEGARGEE

AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Doc Rivers' arrival was supposed to ensure the Milwaukee Bucks would develop into one of the NBA's most dangerous teams by the post-season.

But they sure haven't looked like contenders so far.

The Bucks will return from the All-Star break on Friday at Minnesota having gone 3-7 in Rivers' first 10 games as coach after the team put together a 32-14 record beforehand. There have been questions whether this was a good move for Rivers, although two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo arguably the most important voice when summarizing the situation believes in his new coach.

"He's coached a lot of successful teams in the past," Antetokounmpo said during the All-Star break. "When you have that guy on your bench, you have to be able to bring your 'A' game."

The Bucks have been failing in that effort.

Their last game before the break was an embarrassing 113-110 loss at Memphis, which was missing most of its top players due to injuries.



Milwaukee Bucks head coach Doc Rivers reacts in the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Memphis Grizzlies, Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024, in Memphis, Tenn.

Associated Press

"You don't want to lose games like this ever," Rivers said after that game. "Does that change the way I think about the team? No, it doesn't at all. I got a lot of confidence in this group, but we're going to have to make changes as far as how we want to play every night and how we ease into the game."

There are reasons for the Bucks to be optimistic.

Milwaukee's record before and after Rivers' arrival

doesn't necessarily tell a complete story.

Rivers took over just as the Bucks were entering the most challenging portion of their schedule.

The Bucks haven't had their entire preferred starting five available for any of their last eight games.

The defense has improved. Those factors and Rivers' experience his 1,100 career regular-season coaching wins rank eighth in NBA history make the Bucks

believe they'll eventually succeed with him leading the way. Rivers took over for Adrian Griffin, who was fired just 43 games into his first head coaching job.

But the Bucks haven't delivered in the short time Rivers has been on the bench.

After losing five of their first six games with Rivers, the Bucks won two straight, including a 112-95 victory over the reigning champion Denver Nuggets. But they followed that by losing

123-97 at home to a Miami Heat team missing Jimmy Butler and falling to Memphis' skeleton crew.

The Bucks were 30-13 and second in the East when Griffin was fired. They're now third in the East, 8 1/2 games behind the Boston Celtics and 2 1/2 games behind the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Bucks' management and general manager Jon Horst have made their championship expectations apparent.

Milwaukee fired coach Mike Budenholzer after the Bucks' stunning first-round playoff loss to Miami last year. The Bucks shook up their roster by adding seven-time all-NBA guard Damian Lillard. Then they fired Griffin midway through the season.

"It's been a very, very, very hard season for everybody, not just for the players, for the coaching staff," Antetokounmpo said. "With the changes, it's been a hard season. But through it all, I think we can get it done." Rivers has made a positive impact in one aspect already.

Milwaukee ranks 12th in defensive rating over its last 10 games after being 21st under Griffin. The issues have come on offense. Milwaukee ranks fifth this season in offensive rating but is just 22nd over its last 10 games. The Bucks should benefit from the eventual return of Kris Middleton, who has missed five straight games with a sprained ankle.

Milwaukee needs Lillard to build on the momentum he established last weekend in winning the 3-point shooting contest and getting named All-Star Game MVP. Lillard has shot 10 of 41 from 3-point range over his last five games.

"I think any time you have these types of experiences where you have adversity and things not flowing like you expect them to or like you would want it to, I think that's the time that you've got to just show who you really are," Lillard said. □

Tiger Woods' son shoots 86 in pre-qualifier for PGA Tour event



Tiger Woods, left, watches his son Charlie, right, putt ball during the final round of the PNC Championship golf tournament Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, in Orlando, Fla. Associated Press

HOBE SOUND, Fla. (AP) — The PGA Tour will have to wait for the 15-year-old son of Tiger Woods. In a pre-qualifier Thursday, Charlie Woods took a 12 on one hole and shot 86.

Woods didn't make a birdie at Lost Lake Golf Club, one of four pre-qualifier sites for the Cognizant Classic. About two dozen players combined from the four sites would move on to Monday's qualifier, from which four players earn a spot in the PGA Tour event. Charlie Woods, who turned 15 earlier this month, has played the 36-hole PNC

Championship with his father the last four years in a scramble format.

Woods played with Olin Browne Jr., who qualified for the U.S. Open last summer in Los Angeles. The son of three-time PGA Tour winner Olin Browne shot 72. Woods ran into trouble early with a pair of bogeys and a double bogey on the par-5 fifth hole. But it was on the seventh, with water down the right side and water behind the green, where the teen's hopes ended for good. He made a 12.

Woods made the turn in 47

and had two bogeys and a double bogey on the back for an 86.

The leading score when he finished was a 65. Scores are not updated until a player finishes.

The pre-qualifier comes with a \$250 entry fee for players with no tour status. Tiger Woods was 16 and already had won the first of three straight U.S. Junior Amateur titles when he received a sponsor exemption to play his first PGA Tour event in the Nissan Open at Riviera. He had rounds of 72-75 to miss the cut. □

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Patriots coach Jerod Mayo's new staff a mix of youth, vets and connections to executive Eliot Wolf

By **KYLE HIGHTOWER**
AP Sports Writer

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP)

— Jerod Mayo was clear when he was hired as the New England Patriots new coach that he wanted to empower his new staff with the freedom to have a voice both on the sideline and in the meeting rooms. His new trio of coordinators said Wednesday that they are confident they will have the space they need to help the franchise begin its rebuilding process next season.

Mayo announced the addition of 17 new assistants this week, who will provide support for himself and new coordinators Alex Van Pelt (offensive), DeMarcus Covington (defensive) and Jeremy Springer (special teams). The group is a mix of first-time coaches such as former Patriots linebacker Dont'a Hightower, who will coach his former position, and veterans such



Newly-named New England Patriots head coach Jerod Mayo faces reporters, Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024, during an NFL football news conference, in Foxborough, Mass.

Associated Press

as Ben McAdoo, the former New York Giants head coach, who will be a senior offensive assistant. As a first-time head coach, Mayo said that hiring a for-

mer head coach such as McAdoo was intentional. "It was important to me to have someone I could bounce questions off of that's actually sat in that

seat," Mayo said. "It's been great. And I've had a relationship with coaches around the league as well who have offered to help. They're not in the AFC, so

that's a good thing." Mayo said that director of scouting Eliot Wolf was a key partner in helping build out the staff, and his imprint is easy to spot.

Wolf worked with both Van Pelt and new defensive line coach Jerry Montgomery during Wolf's time as a member of the Green Bay Packers' front office.

McAdoo was also the quarterbacks coach for the Packers in 2012 and 2013 when Van Pelt was their running backs coach.

Mayo said the fact that Van Pelt was fired after four seasons as Cleveland's offensive coordinator wasn't a deterrent to bringing him in to try to fix a Patriots offense that ranked near the bottom of the league in multiple categories.

"AVP ... I don't want to get into what happened in Cleveland, but all the people I talked to — they speak very highly of AVP," Mayo said. □

Chicago Bears add Jennifer King as their 1st ever female assistant coach



Washington Football Team assistant running backs coach Jennifer King works with the team before an NFL football game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Sunday, Nov. 14, 2021, in Landover, Md.

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. (AP) — The Chicago Bears have hired

Jennifer King as their first female coach in franchise history working as an offensive assistant with running backs.

Coach Matt Eberflus filled out his staff Wednesday by announcing the final six members.

Chris Beatty will coach wide receivers with Chad Morton in charge of running backs. Thomas Brown will be the offensive passing game coordinator, Jason Houghtaling the assistant offensive line coach and Robbie Picazo an offensive assistant working with quarterbacks and receivers. King became the first Black

female in NFL history to serve as a primary position coach in 2021 with Washington. She first was hired by Washington in 2020 as an offensive intern, and she spent the past three seasons as an assistant running backs coach.

She played 12 seasons as a seven-time All-American quarterback and wide receiver for the Carolina Phoenix women's tackle football team from 2006-17. Brown has 13 years of experience, including the past four in the NFL. He was offensive coordinator for the Carolina Panthers in 2023 after working the three

previous seasons with the Rams. Beatty is a former CFL player who was wide receivers coach for the Los Angeles Chargers the past three seasons. He also has 15 seasons of coaching experience in college.

A seven-year NFL veteran, Morton spent the previous 10 seasons in various roles for the Seattle Seahawks. He has coached 15 seasons in the NFL. Picazo has coached 11 years, the past two with Seattle and Houston.

Houghtaling spent the past three seasons with the Tennessee Titans, the final as offensive line coach. □